

Sermon – Mark 2:23—3:6  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
2 Pentecost – Year B  
2 June 2024

“Give It a Rest”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It was going to be another busy day. Hockey games, baseball games, and a piano recital. Just another day in the life of the Lyles. Nature, however, had other plans. As you are well aware, it rained yesterday. It rained and rained and rained. And suddenly, where once there had been a color-coded block on our afternoon calendar, suddenly there was nothing. Hockey and piano still happened, but the baseball games were not to be. I found myself staring into three unoccupied hours, 180 minutes unclaimed by anything at all. There were surely lots of productive things I could have done; maybe even some things I *should* have done. But I didn't do those things. Nope. Instead, I took a nap. I read a book – and not a particularly useful book either, just a mystery novel set in Door County. Since it was raining, I sat on our covered deck and watched the rain for a while. I suppose I should point out that Erika didn't benefit from this at all! She still had to drive to Wisconsin for hockey. Like most of you, I spend a lot of my time trying to figure out how to best use my time. But yesterday afternoon, time used me. It was beautiful. It was, you might say, sabbath.
2. School has ended, at least here at Grace, and we embark now upon summer – that time when life's rhythms get a little bit slower, or at least that's what we tell ourselves. But as the meme reminds us, “Adulthood is saying, ‘But after this week things will slow down a bit’ over and over until you die.” So things

might not really be slowing down but with summer, for the church, comes Ordinary Time. Not ordinary as in uneventful, but as in ordinal, as we begin counting our way through these Sundays after Pentecost. See? You've learned something on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost! During this time in the church year, our readings focus on the ministry and teachings of Jesus. And today's is a doozy, as Mark tells us of the last two of five different controversies in which Jesus finds himself embroiled. And wouldn't you know, they're both about time. Sabbath.

3. Walking through the fields, the disciples start plucking grain. Are they hungry? Bored? Distracted? Mark doesn't tell us. But they are doing work, in direct contradiction to the command to honor the sabbath and keep it holy. Upon entering a synagogue, Jesus takes it upon himself to heal a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees are up in arms on both counts, and rightly so. It is worth remembering, as the Pharisees come onto the scene for the first time in Mark's gospel, that they weren't bad dudes. And they weren't wrong. The Pharisees were not people with power, like the Herodians or Sadducees. They yearned for the restoration of Israel and believed that their hope was in the Torah. Which makes sense, frankly. God had commanded the people to obey the commandments; kind of why they were called commandments, right? And the Pharisees urged the people to do so. And, on today's topics, the Pharisees were right. They disciples, presumably, were not starving to death. They didn't need that grain. And the man with the withered hand? He wasn't in mortal danger. He could have come back to see Jesus on Tuesday. These were not life and death situations. Why heal the man on that day?
  
4. It's important to note, I think, that Jesus is not dismantling the concept of sabbath, of resting on the sabbath day. Neither is he nitpicking about the rules. As pointed out by Abraham Joshua Heschel – a monumentally influential rabbi left Poland a mere six weeks before Germany invaded in 1939 – sabbath is to time as temple and tabernacle are to space. Yes, God is

everywhere, but God gifts the people with temple and tabernacle so that they would know where, exactly, they can find God. God is also *everywhen* but gives the people sabbath so that they know when, exactly, they can find God. Heschel calls the sabbath a cathedral in time, an inbreaking of eternity into the now. Sabbath, as we read in Deuteronomy, is also the great equalizer. Not only do you not get to work; you don't get to make your slaves work. The text acknowledges the brokenness of human systems – surely there are no slaves in God's economy – but demands that the systems relent every seventh day. Sabbath insists, as much for us in our 24/7 culture of availability as for Jesus' original audience, that we stop. That we stop producing, creating, exchanging, subordinating. Sabbath pulls us up short, forces us to acknowledge that we will never finish. That completeness comes not from our efforts, from doing what we should, but as a gift from the God who rested on the seventh day. Sabbath reminds us, as I discovered yesterday in the rain, that we need sabbath. Jesus is attacking none of this.

5. The point is not at all about whether we should keep sabbath. It's about what sabbath is. Or, more to the point, it's about *who* sabbath is. Jesus is not debating the finer points of sabbath-keeping with the Pharisees on equal footing. On equal footing, the Pharisees win. No, Jesus proclaims, without hesitation or equivocation, that *he* is the Lord of the sabbath. At first blush, it sounds like he's simply asserting authority, but there's more going on. He is redefining sabbath. To put it bluntly, Jesus *is* our sabbath. Just as he is the newly resurrected temple occupying space in our world, so is he the eternally in-breaking presence of God occupying time in our world. We who are tired, exhausted, overworked, under-slept, over-activated, under-cared for? Come unto me all who are weary, Jesus says, and I will give you rest. I will give you rest. Your work is never done? Look to the cross and see that all that is needful is completed. By the end of today's reading, the wheels of Jesus' crucifixion have been put in motion; by the grace of God, it is in Jesus'

dying and rising that we can finally lay down our burdens, cast off this world's demands, and rest.

6. Friends, Jesus today is calling to you. It's summer. Slow down. Give it a rest. The intricacies about the legal code are beside the point. Jesus isn't telling you what you should do. The word "should" doesn't really belong in our Christian vocabulary. It's like telling kids they "should" eat ice cream. Who cares about the should? Just take it! Friends, come home and rest. Are you hungry? Come, and be fed with all that you need. Hurting and broken? Come to the Lord who isn't going to wait until next Tuesday to heal you; he will make you whole now. Come unto Jesus and rest. For he is the Lord of the sabbath. He has done all that is needful. Goodness knows you need it. So, come. He welcomes you even now. Come.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.